



## Montessori for 0 to 3 years olds

There is an increasing demand for Montessori infant-toddler programmes for children under three years. A small number of Montessori early childhood centres in New Zealand offer programmes for infants-toddlers and there are a growing number of parent-infant playgroups.

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A Montessori infant-toddler environment is an adapting continuum from the bonded relationship between adult and child through to support for the young child's growing sense of self and independence. The infant-toddler prepared environment is characterised by order, simplicity and beauty which meet the needs of the child.

Montessori infant-toddler communities should be lead by specially trained Montessori infant teachers.

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### **Montessori for Infants**

The infant community is called a 'nido' – Italian for 'nest' and the learning environment is designed to meet the developmental needs of babies to approximately 16 months of age.

The 'nido' environment is especially prepared to stimulate the young infant and is divided into five areas: movement, eating, sleeping, physical care and outside.

The focus of the infant environment is on fostering basic trust in the child.

The Montessori adult has a caring, respectful response to the infant's needs, both physical and psychological and conveys the message of unconditional love and acceptance.

There are very few Montessori nido communities for children under 15-16 months in New Zealand.

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## **Montessori for Toddlers**

The toddler community is designed for children who are walking securely through age three.

New opportunities for movement and independence, along with the development of spoken language form the curriculum for this class. Group activities such as singing and stories provide young children with the experience of belonging to a community.

Food preparation and outdoor play provide a framework to encourage social development. Through his or her chosen activity, the toddler's concentration and self-confidence grow.

Everything in the environment is proportionate to the child's size and is designed to be safe and aesthetically pleasing for children.

The toddler classroom is simpler and slower paced than the early childhood

(three to six year old) classroom. The Montessori materials and activities are particular to this age group and do not include simplified materials from the Montessori 3-6 curriculum.

Toddlers are given opportunities to work in the development of language skills, art, music, sensorial and practical life.

The practical life area is particularly emphasized as the activities in this area give children the chance to develop skills to care for themselves and their environment in the following areas: control of movement, grace and courtesy.

Practical life activities are simple and can be accomplished by each child offering a repetitive cycle, which helps the child establish patterns of order and sequencing. Due to the fact that these are very real activities, each child becomes grounded in reality.

Building the child's self esteem is the ultimate goal and this is accomplished through repeated successes with these activities.

Through song and dance and freedom of choice, the toddlers have access to a variety of large muscle activities that offer them opportunities to jump, climb, balance, crawl or skip. These exercises as well as creative art activities, are offered for each child to choose.

This freedom in a safe space is crucial to the toddler programme. However, it is always tempered by two important limits that will be beneficial for a lifetime, respect for others and respect for the environment.

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*“The child is endowed with unknown powers, which can guide us to a radiant future. If what we really want is a new world, then education must take as its aim the development of these hidden possibilities.”*

— Maria Montessori, The Absorbent Mind

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**Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand**

PO Box 31-461, Lower Hutt, Wellington 3144 , New Zealand

Phone: 0274 485 525, Email: [eo@montessori.org.nz](mailto:eo@montessori.org.nz)

